

Introduction

New Jersey State Records Manual: Intention and Scope

The purpose of this manual is to introduce state government officials to the methods available for controlling public records entrusted to their care. It can provide the tools needed to solve record-keeping problems, increase efficiency and safety, preserve historical records, and save money.

The manual presents information in logical order, with appropriate procedures outlined for ease of application. The text is cross-referenced. Appended materials include forms, statutory citations, administrative guidelines, and a general schedule for state agencies.

This publication does not suggest that all of the programs described should be implemented immediately or in their entirety, or in precisely the way indicated herein. The Division of Archives and Records Management recognizes that many state agencies and authorities have their own in-house records managers who are responsible for ethically and legally upholding the law concerning public records.

Provided that they meet mandated standards and legal requirements, state agencies and authorities should always use procedures relevant to their organizational culture and techniques appropriate to their individual circumstances, especially administrative size. Costs and benefits, budgetary levels, and the value of records should always be considered.

By using appropriate techniques faithfully, state agencies and authorities will realize demonstrable benefits. While still fulfilling public responsibilities, they will avoid the cost of unnecessary space, equipment, supplies, and labor for record-keeping operations.

Officials are encouraged to contact the Division of Archives and Records Management for clarification and additional detail, and to comment upon the usefulness of this manual. Because it is designed to be readily updated and revised, reports from officials who use the manual are not only sincerely welcome, but essential.

Address questions or comments to: New Jersey Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Management, 2300 Stuyvesant Avenue, CN 307, Trenton, New Jersey, 08625, or call: (609) 530-3200.

Records Management in New Jersey

A Brief History

Concern for the safekeeping of New Jersey's public records traces its beginnings back to 1760,

when an act was passed to construct a building in each of New Jersey's twin colonial capitals, Burlington and Perth Amboy, to protect the records of the Provincial Secretary's (now Secretary of State's) Office. In 1795, these repositories were consolidated into a single building in Trenton, which had recently become the sole capital of the independent State of New Jersey.

Twentieth-century concern for safekeeping public records began in earnest with the creation of the Public Records Office in 1920. Most of the current functions of the central control of public records started there. By 1924 it was necessary for state, county, and municipal agencies to obtain written permission from the Public Records Office for records destruction.

The Destruction of Public Records Act, 1953, created the State Records Committee, and gave it the final authority involving public records. The State Records Committee consists of representatives of the state attorney general, state auditor, state treasurer, director of local government services in the Department of Community Affairs, and the director of the Division of Archives and Records Management in the Department of State. The division is the principal records management advisor to state, county, and municipal governments and serves as the administrative arm of the State Records Committee.

The Division of Archives and Records Management, Department of State, is composed of three bureaus: The Bureau of Archives and Records Preservation (commonly called the New Jersey State Archives), the Bureau of Records Management, and the Bureau of Micrographics and Alternative Records Storage.

Current Practice

The Division of Archives and Records Management, Department of State, has four distinct areas of responsibility:

Records and Forms Analysis

1. Assists state agencies and authorities in inventorying records, actually conducting inventories whenever feasible
2. Appraises records of state, county, and municipal governments, and schedules the records for retention, transfer, and disposition through the auspices of the State Records Committee
3. Offers advice in records management, files management, office automation, vital records programs, and disaster prevention
4. Participates in records disaster recovery efforts through records identification
5. Provides advice about forms analysis and design
6. Processes records disposal requests for records that have outlived their usefulness

The records and forms analysis section of the Bureau of Records Management is located at the New Jersey Records Storage Center, 2300 Stuyvesant Avenue, in Ewing Township, just outside of Trenton. The bureau does not charge for consultations (see sections II, VI, and IX).

Records Storage

1. Provides centralized storage of semiactive records for state agencies and authorities
2. Provides records retrieval services for authorized state officials
3. Advises all public sector agencies and authorities about semiactive records storage options

The records storage section of the Bureau of Records Management is located at 2300 Stuyvesant Avenue, in Ewing Township, just outside of Trenton, where it administers the New Jersey Records Storage Center (RSC), a low-cost storage facility with the capacity of keeping 250,000 cubic feet of semicurrent paper and computer records from state government agencies and authorities. The RSC offers all storage and associated services free-of-charge to state agencies and authorities (see section III).

Archives

1. Appraises records for statewide historical significance and for permanent retention in the State Archives
2. Accessions historical records by transferring them from originating agencies
3. Preserves historical records through conservation and restoration
4. Arranges and describes historically valuable records
5. Assists researchers in person and by mail in researching state archival records
6. Participates in records disaster recovery efforts
7. Assists all public sector agencies and authorities in identifying and caring for permanent records

The Bureau of Archives and Records Preservation is located in the State Library building at 185 West State Street, in the State Capital Complex, Trenton. The bureau operates the New Jersey State Archives, the official repository for all colonial and state government records of enduring historical value. Such records are maintained and are available to the public for research at the archives search room, open to the public Tuesday through Friday, 8:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. The State Archives also produces a variety of publications describing its holdings and services, and sells microfilm copies of many important historical documents, manuscripts, and newspapers.

The Archives provides consultations on records preservation to public agencies at no cost (see section IV).

Microfilm Services

1. Provides systems consultations and assists in estimating cost for microfilming projects to public sector agencies

2. Conducts selected microfilming projects for state agencies and commissions on a charge-back basis
3. Assists state, county, and municipal governments in micrographics management
4. Monitors compliance with statewide microfilm standards for the public sector

The Bureau of Micrographics and Alternative Records Storage is located in the New Jersey Records Storage Center, 2300 Stuyvesant Avenue, in Ewing Township, just outside of Trenton. Consultations are provided at no cost (see section V).

Public Records

A record is created whenever information that documents the activities of an organization is generated or received, and stored on any of a variety of media, including paper, microfilm, magnetic tape, floppy disks, optical disks, or duplicate copies.

The term “public” can have two basic meanings:

1. **Ownership** — A record is public when it documents activities of an operating unit of government or an agent of government that receives a substantial contribution of tax dollars to conduct its activities.

A record is private when it is evidence of activities of an organization that does not receive any substantial contribution of tax dollars to conduct those activities.

2. **Access** — Agencies are often required to allow unrestricted access to records because of right-to-know laws. Such records are often called “public.” Under other circumstances, an agency may restrict access by regulation to records because of considerations of privacy, confidentiality, or security.

The degree of a record’s accessibility does not determine whether a record is publicly or privately owned. For instance, classified military records concerning the national defense are public records, even though they are not publicly accessible for reasons of security.

The status of a record is best determined by considering its ownership, not its accessibility. In this manual, the term “public record” always signifies ownership.

The Importance of State Government Records: A Public Trust

The records of state government are evidence of citizens’ rights and property ownership, taxes paid, services rendered, and obligations met. These records are crucial to the organization of our society and are valuable to the daily operation of state agencies and authorities. Additionally, the value of some records endures beyond their active use because they provide unique evidence of significant actions and transactions that have affected the public.

The records of state government are public property and are held in trust for citizens. Public officials must ensure that records are protected from unauthorized alteration, defacement, transfer, or destruction. This is accomplished through compliance with statewide legal procedures mandated

by the Destruction of Public Records Act, as interpreted by the State Records Committee and administered by the Division of Archives and Records Management.

In addition to its mandated functions, the division assists state government in assessing current information management needs and in anticipating future concerns.

Generally, through the use of sound management practices, state agencies and authorities can develop economical strategies for fulfilling their public trust.

Agency Records Management Coordinators & Liaisons

Many state agencies and authorities employ records and forms managers who are highly knowledgeable in both statewide statutory requirements and guidelines, as well as any relevant policies and procedures governing records management within their organizations. These managers work very closely with division analysts to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded, and in most situations already perform the processes described in this manual as a service to their organization.

On the other hand, those organizations that do not employ their own records managers, preferring to assign record-keeping functions as an ancillary role to officials with other responsibilities, will learn a great deal more from this manual.

In any case, the information provided by this will explain techniques, offer insights, and list laws, regulations, and guidelines that will help improve record-keeping efficiency and safety.